

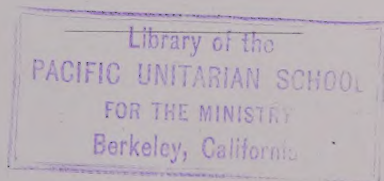
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FRIENDSHIP AND FRIENDS

A SERMON

*PREACHED AT THE SOUTH CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH, APRIL 23, 1887.*

By E. E. HALE.



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FRIENDSHIP AND FRIENDS.

“I have called you friends.” — JOHN XV: 15.

A MAN dies and is buried. The newspapers tell his name and tell us that he has given a million to the college or the hospital. And we say that we never heard he was alive.

Another man dies the next week, whose body is followed to the grave by the best, the most thoughtful, the richest, the poorest, the old and the young. Men stop at the corners of the streets to ask what the city, what the commonwealth shall do without him. Yes; and years after, as you meet men far away in travelling, they will go back to the memory of this man; they will tell you fond little anecdotes about him; they will remind you of the tones of his voice, of his habits of expression, and of his way of life. He may not have left a cent to college or hospital, he may not have had a cent to leave. But, as the son of Sirach says, his memorial remains. The man is not forgotten. The other man is forgotten. There may be a hall named after him at Cambridge, or a ward named after him in the hospital; all the same, he is forgotten. The name itself is more ghastly than his dried bones would be. For men say, as they go and come, “Who was this Holworthy, or this Holden, who built this hall?” and unless they had friends, unless they did something in life to make men love them and remember them, the dreary fact that they did not, stands out, all the more sadly, because the unadorned names remain.

Now it is of no sort of consequence whether we are remembered or forgotten when we die. But it is of consequence whether our lives are successful or are failures, and this is a matter which, while we live, we can attend to and must attend to. Am I succeeding or am I failing? In matter of fact, we do attend to it more or less distinctly. An hour of low spirits involves a dozen different impressions that I have not succeeded, that I have wasted time, or money, or other opportunity. Now, in this introspection which asks whether, on the whole, I am a failure, or if, on the other hand, I have succeeded, there is probably no simpler test than that other question, "Have I, on the whole, made loyal friends, or do I find that, on the whole, I am fighting out the battle of life alone?"

And I should like to say a word here, — in passing, — particularly to young men and women, who are puzzling themselves with the first and original problem of life, I should like to say that it is not quite so difficult a problem as they make it. "Why am I alive?" that is the question. Am I living to get forward, as this man says; to be praised, as that woman says; to be loved, as the novels say; to be great, as the histories say; to grow rich, as the misers say; or to glorify God and enjoy him, as the catechism says. This great question, "What am I for?" is undoubtedly the tragic and dramatic question for young life, and the poems and the novels and the biographies fail unless they express it. Now it will be a sufficient answer for any youth or maiden, though not, perhaps, what the philosophers would call an adequate answer, to say, "I am here to succeed." That is, — I will use the faculties I have to their full; my eyes shall show me the glory of the world; my ears shall hear its best music; with my legs and my feet I will run as those who run best; with my hands I will cut and carve as the best do; my brain shall think truly; my tongue shall speak kindly. If I am called to an account to-night, my account

in God's great banking-house shall be better than it was last night. This, I say, is a good working answer, whether it meets the needs of a philosophical solution or no.

But it is not always easy to say if we have succeeded. And here again, as a practical help in the management of life, it is wise and fair to see, that, on the whole, one may say that he who has made friends, loyal and true, — if they have been friends in various circumstances and lines of life, — may be sure that he has partly succeeded in life and has not wholly failed. He has good evidence that, to a certain point, at least, he has used God's gifts for that for which God gave them. It is not simply that he is happier because he has troops of friends around him, but he has so much right to say that

“He did the thing that he was sent to do.”

It is now some years since the friends of a man who had worshipped here, and whom everybody loved who knew him, came to me as one of his friends, and asked me to suggest a line of inscription for his monument at Mt. Auburn. I wrote several such inscriptions, — quoting from one author and another, words which seemed appropriate. But the unanimous decision of all of us who knew him, was that this line should be carved upon the stone :

“This man had the art of making friends.” That was all. I had heard Dr. Hedge use the words, where they were eminently appropriate, at the funeral of another man, who fills, I fancy, no large place in the dictionaries of biography, but who never met a student but he taught him, an enquirer but he answered him, or one who was sad but he encouraged him, one who was weak but he strengthened him, and so he earned this great tribute :

“THIS MAN HAD THE ART OF MAKING FRIENDS.”

Now we are to observe what is that quality of friendship which makes it thus a fit token of success of an infinite

being. If I live within myself, for myself, and for my own purposes, however intense that life, it is of course limited. It is limited by the range of my own senses. It has but one centre. But I! I am an infinite being. I must not be limited. I must not be tied up to such trifles as these hands or feet or eyes may compass. I must go outside their rather narrow range, and take in more interests than my own personal observation alone can connect me with.

If I go through this wilderness of life for a day alone, I can only draw in upon the paper at night the line of my own track, as it crosses one brook here and another there; this brook flowing east, and that flowing west; here is a pile of rocks, and there a plain of alkali. But when, by my camp-fire, there come in from different sides John and James and Andrew and Silas and the rest, as we lay the paper out and plot in our different surveys, this sign explains that, my bearings confirm his, and the indications of my lonely path become intelligible with the comparison and in the light of theirs. Now, when the map we make is the map of infinite life, something so much larger and broader than any poor patch of earthly surface, even the little hint which a near friend gives us, as he tells the absolute truth of his own vital experience, is invaluable to us, in the more than support which it gives to our personal observation. For we must not say that two such observations, from two points of view, are worth merely twice as much as one. Why! They are worth infinitely more than one. The worth is to be measured by a different standard. It belongs in a different plane of affairs. And here at bottom is the secret of the infinite encouragement which we gain so often from sympathy or conversation. After having dragged and drudged along in abject failure in my own path, I have the chance to compare notes with a real friend who will open to me the whole course of his experience. The observation I made seemed futile. But when

my line of sight crosses his upon the map, we have one point sure. The experiment I tried seemed a failure. But when I compare it with his experiment, the two contain the positive truth. I find out in such comparison, reason to suppose that partial evil may be universal good. I see that God permits my mistake of to-day, in order that when it is compared to my friend's mistake, we two may work out the victory of to-morrow.

You shall see two men, side by side, in society, who are as strongly contrasted as these two men whose funerals I described when I began. Each of them is, in conversation, very entertaining, in his way very instructive. But, after a little, you tire of the one, as you do of certain pictures on your wall, which you liked at first, and you find you cleave to the other. You want to see him more. You would be glad to meet him every day. Now the difference is, that the first can only talk of his own affairs. He is like the man in the story, who sat so silent in the coach because Theodore Hood,—the universal talker,—had not tried him on leather. *He* can only talk and can only think of himself. "Now that way madness lies," as Lear says so sadly and so wisely. The other man makes "himself of no reputation." That is the greatest thing which was ever said of the Leader of us all. He is willing to learn, he is eager to learn. Perhaps he has begun at the beginning. Perhaps he has learned the language of his time. This is my interpretation of what men call a liberal education. The man liberally educated is he who can understand the language of his time. He can learn of astronomy from astronomers. He can learn of chemistry from chemists. He can learn of government from statesmen. But this is merely intellectual training. He who lives in the larger life wants to understand the language of his time. He makes himself of no reputation. He takes upon himself the place and duty of a listener. He interests himself, as a friend

does, in the affair of his friend, and is able to lend himself, as a friend does, to that friend's affair. Give him friends enough, then, and his work becomes work with and for all the world, nay he goes outside this world with those who descend into the depths and mount to the height on eagles' wings.

I knew a man, who went down town unhurt, from his home, the day after the Boston fire. Do you say that because he had lost nothing, he had nothing to do with that catastrophe? You say that because you did not know him. He met one of two young men, who had started in business under his auspices, and, in their prosperous career, had lost everything, as so many of you did. "You are the man I am looking for," said my friend. "I have been writing to New York, to such and such dry goods firms, to say that they are to honor your orders to such and such an amount." He named a very large amount, sufficient for a generous start in new enterprise, and said: "I think you had better go to New York to select the goods today, while your partner finds a store here to receive them." Now such a man as that does not know what Mr. Malleck means when he asks if life is worth living. Life has its trials for him, yes, and hard trials. But life is not petty to him. It is not limited. It is large enough. You say he retires from business. Yes. But he does not retire from life. He enlarges his life on every side where loyally and intelligently he takes up his friend's affair.

And, on the other hand, the man who receives a kind office from another's friendship, is made alive again, he is new-born by the inspiration. I remember a college boy who wrote to me: "I ought to come out fit for something, when such a one, and such a one, naming two loyal friends, have been willing to care for me." The savage man Friday, in the great story, becomes a man, — he is a different creature after he wins the friendship of Robinson Crusoe.

So I remember one of the first and best men whom I have ever known, after he had lost a dear son by death. "Every one," he said, is so careful for me. Every one is so eager to do something to serve me. If I never knew what the worth of love was before, I should know it now. For in the tender watchfulness of my friends, I live on angels' food."

"The man that hath friends," says the book of Proverbs, "must show himself friendly." And, generally, it will happen that he does. A man cannot see another life ruling with him and for him, another man thinking for him, another's hand helping him, without at least asking himself, "How shall I take hold, and where can I help in the forward march?" But there are cases, where men are so self-absorbed, so self-centred, that they take the friendship of others, their kindly thoughts and friendly deeds without return. They classify themselves among the ungrateful men. Well! Was this a matter of bargain? Did you give so much love, that so much more might be paid back to you? - No, indeed! It was into the common stock that you paid. It was not this man, one little partner who was to repay you. It was the good God's work you were carrying forward, not merely A's life, or B's. Be sure, then, that you have not failed. Your life is larger as your thought was kinder, and your will more brave. I knew a man who came to sudden fortune with his wife. His charities became immense, as he found he had immense wealth in hand. And so the people, learned in such things, tried to persuade him that he was doing great harm by giving so much money to beggars. "I know two people to whom our gifts have been a great blessing," said she. "If they have helped no one else, they have helped my husband and me."

For there is one Friend who has a quick return for every tenderness you show to him or any of his children. Many children he has, and he remembers them all. A sad set

are some of them. They have forgotten their Father's house, or have done their best to do so. But there are others who remember him, who know something of his purpose and try to forward it, as with a child's power they can. Who lends his life to any of these, either to those who forget home or those who remember it, finds out, indeed, what we mean by the larger life,—he enters in and lives in it. In the morning his children are on his knee. The little ones are smoothing his hair, or rubbing out the wrinkles on his forehead, or he is on the floor with them turning arches with the blocks, or pushing their little railway trains. As the day went on, he has been down town advising this old apprentice about his building, or writing for that old friend his letter of introduction. In the afternoon he presided at the children's mission or approved the plans for the convalescent home. At dinner he received this traveller from Bremen, and that from Valparaiso, and introduced them both to the best we have here. And evening comes, and they are all gone. The children are in bed. The apprentice is at his home. The travellers are at their inn. But is he, the friend of all of them, alone? No. He is not alone. His life is a life too large for loneliness.

“Lo, I am not alone, for the Father is with me,” saith the Master; and again, “The Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”

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